

Tama Artstar Kit

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.



Thick or thin? 12-ply or 4-ply? Which is better? A common theory is that, since fine acoustic violins and guitars use thin wood for quality tone and resonance, the same would hold true for drums. Combining this philosophy with suggestions from Neil Peart, Tama has developed a thinner-shell kit called *Artstar*.

Artstar shells are made of birch wood sandwiched between two plies of cordia wood. The bass drum shell has a thickness of 9mm, while the toms and snare are 6mm thick (or thin, depending on how you interpret it). All drum hardware is attached with brass screws and nuts. Components of the Tama *Artstar* kit tested are: 16 x 24 bass drum, 12 x 13 and 13 x 14 tom-toms, 16 x 18 floor tom, 8 x 14 snare drum, plus *Titan* hardware.

Bass Drum

The 16 x 24 power bass drum has ten stretch lugs, spanning the depth of the shell, with 20 T-handle tuning rods. Wooden hoops are used, which match the drum's hi-gloss wood finish. Tama uses disappearing spurs on this drum. They are threaded at their tips, and may be converted from rubber to spike point. The spurs are secured in their brackets by simple T-screws, and are mounted at a slight forward angle. These spurs do a good job in holding the bass drum in a steady position.

A felt strip is installed behind the batter head, and Tama thoughtfully includes a small package which has two key rods to replace the bottom T-handle rods on the drum, if one so desires, plus, a set of hoop spacers for using the drum single headed, while still retaining structural strength. The playing side of the bass drum is fitted with a *Pinstripe*, while the audience side has a Tama *Mirage* head—a mirrored, smooth *Ambassador*. Besides being able to reflect stage lights, the *Mirage* head can supply club audiences with a lot of fun, if they look into it while you're pounding the bass drum. The head vibrates, and gives their images a "fun-house" effect! This drum had good depth and solid tone. It speaks clearly, and is the perfect rock 'n' roll bass drum, due to its size. However, it is certainly not cheap, having a retail price of \$810.00.

Tom-Toms

The *Artstar* 12 x 13 tom-tom has six stretch lugs and 12 rods; the 13 x 14 has eight stretch lugs and 16 rods. The 16 x 18 floor tom also has eight stretch lugs, plus three legs which are each knurled in three sections at their top halves. T-screw brackets secure the legs via direct clamping.

Tama *Artstar* logo badges have an antiqued brass appearance, and also include serial numbers. For drummers

concerned with brand visibility, Tama considerably includes an extra logo badge with each tom-tom, in case the way the drums are set up does not allow the badges to face front. The extras have adhesive backings, and stick right on.

The toms have no mufflers installed, and are fitted with *Pinstripes* on both sides. I'm somewhat puzzled by the factory's idea of installing thick, overtone-canceling heads on *both* batter and bottom, since the whole concept of *Artstar* is for more resonant sounds. The *Pinstripes* supply a funky tone, with clarity and depth, but if I wanted a more articulate voice on the toms, I'd change to thinner heads, or at least, put a thinner head (like an *Ambassador*) on the bottom.

Mounting System

Tama has totally revamped their tom-tom mount since my last review of their drums (*MD*: Nov. '82). The new holder is called *OmniLock* and is quite an innovation, since the L-arms are secured with cam levers, instead of the usual T-bolt system.

A diamond-shaped base plate on the bass drum accepts a single down post. This tube has a large memory lock collar ring, and is secured by indirect clamping (a steel strip inside the base-plate bracket). Atop the post are two independent, encased ball systems which are set up in an adjustable "V" pattern that allows spreading of the arms and almost any useable tom angle. The two pieces which make up the "V" are secured at the top of the post by a T-screw. A knurled L-arm protrudes from each ball, and each arm has a *Key-Lock* memory clamp fitted on. The memory lings have a collar which fits tight against the rectangular drum bracket to stop all twisting and turning of the drum. (The drum brackets themselves utilize an inner eye bolt.) To adjust tom-tom angle and spread, merely flip up the spring-loaded lever on the ball casing, set the desired position, and flip the lever down to lock it in. Tension of the locking lever can be adjusted by a round nut at the bottom of each casing, and the casings may be positioned up and down the post via a single drumkey-operated screw. In my opinion, Tama now has one of the best holders on the market, and probably the easiest to operate. I would like to see some sort of gauge on the post and casings for use as reference marks when breaking down and setting up.

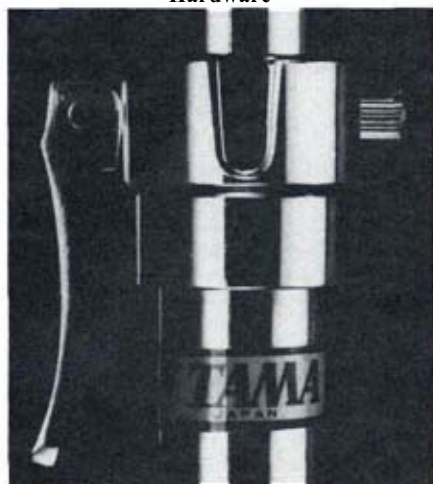
Snare Drum

A wooden 8 x 14 snare drum came with

the kit I tested. It has ten double-ended lugs, and die-cast hoops. The snare side hoop has a dropped gate. Tama's strainer uses a fat block on the throw-off side with a fine-tune knob. The strainer releases cross-wise, and both the throw-off and butt ends have a roller bed to ease strain on the connecting strips (which, by the way, are not cord, but doubled glass tape). These strips connect to the 18-strand snare unit, which extends a bit past the bottom head.

Tama's knob-operated *One-Touch* muffler is installed here. Once set to the level of dampening desired, it can lock on or off for fast, efficient changes. The drum is fitted with a coated *Ambassador* batter and *Ambassador* snare-side head. This snare drum sounded a bit choked at higher tunings, but came across well at lower pitches. The rimshots were solid, thanks to the die-cast hoops, and the drum itself had a pleasing resonance.

Hardware



The *Titan* hardware line has been revised to include the new *TouchLock* levers at all height joints. The system consists of a cam lever with fine-adjust knob, plus a large set-in nylon bushing. As on the tom-tom holder, a flick of the lever locks in tube position very securely. The *TouchLock* mechanism is a great aid to quick set-ups and tear-downs.

Two 6892 cymbal stands are included. Each has a double-braced tripod base and two adjustable-height tiers. The tiller is a modified sprung ratchet which can fold right up against the top tube. These stands have one-piece nylon sleeve nuts atop their tillers, which hold the cymbal on the stand, replacing the usual wing nut and rubber tubing sleeve. They are also a good safety device, since it's impossible to tighten the cymbal down all the way and risk cracking it. There are new, revised versions out called *Cymbal Mates* (black nylon and a new T shape), but unfortunately, they were not used on the stands with this particular kit. The cymbals stands are very sturdy and have positive grip tilters which can hold any size cymbal.

The snare stand also has a double-

braced tripod with large wedge feet, and is designed with the common basket and carriage nut. A brake drum tilter is used, locking with a T-screw. The stand can go pretty low, and all in all, works just fine.

Tama's new *Pro Beat* pedal has a flat, split footboard, unlike their old models which were curved. It has a single expansion spring stretched downward, and is tensionable via a locking nut near the base. The pedal is chain-drive, and has adjustable-stroke, footboard height and beater height. Hoop clamping is done with the popular open-jaw plate with wing screw. The *Pro Beat* is much lighter than Tama's *King Beat* pedal, and has a quicker response and more comfortable feel.

The 6895 hi-hat has a double-braced tripod, and like the other stands, incorporates the *TouchLock* system. It, too, uses the new footboard design, and has an externally housed compression spring. Spring adjustment is made from a large cap on the housing tube, which makes it very easy to adjust tension from the playing position. The stand uses a chain-pull linkage, and has a knob spur at its base, plus a memory lock on the height tube. Tama's *Titan* hi-hat has always been a favorite of mine. Right out of the box, it has comfortable action and noise-free response. Now, the new footboard and new locking system make it even better. My only criticism is that they could lengthen the top rod a bit to accommodate tall players.

Available as an accessory option is the *X-Hat*—an auxiliary closed hi-hat boom mount. The *X-Hat* is fitted onto a *Multi-Clamp* for mounting onto any stand. It has two separate height adjustments plus two separate angle adjustments. Cymbal tension can be adjusted from a tight, totally closed sound to wide open. Popular with double-bass players, and an interesting option for single-bass drummers, the *X-Hat* retails at \$70.00.

Cosmetics

The *Artstar* kits are only available in one finish: South American cordia. This is an exotic wood, buffed to a high gloss. The finish is just beautiful, and is comparable to the Sonor *Signature* finishes. (It seems that foreign companies always have a magical touch with wood!)

The *Artstar* kit was intentionally designed for a more "alive" sound, and Tama has accomplished this task. The drums are vibrant and responsive. I would think that an *Artstar* kit in small jazz sizes would be *superb*. For an even more resonant shell, it might make sense to use separate small lugs instead of the long double-ended stretch lugs, since the amount of hardware on the shell could thus be reduced. In the hardware field, Tama has done a great job once again. Perhaps they can complete the *TouchLock* conversion by applying it to tom-tom brackets and floor tom legs! The kit tested here retails at \$2,723.00.

DAVID GARIBALDI

Best Funk Drummer
in the
1984 Modern Drummer Readers Poll

CONGRATULATIONS

